



Badlands

A *Views of the National Parks* virtual experience



Carved by water, the eroded Badlands landscape dwarfs the surrounding prairie. The banded pinnacles and buttes are, at first, a bit foreboding. Native Americans called the area "mako sika", meaning "land bad." French fur trappers referred to it as "les mauvaises terres à traverser" or "bad lands to travel across." These names are understandable. The Badlands are a dry, desolate place consisting of steep cliffs, towering buttes, and deeply eroded canyons. The ground is covered with sediments that have eroded from these features, leaving the landscape a ghostly white. In the summer, the white sediments reflect the sun's rays, adding to the already blistering heat. In the winter, the air is bitterly cold. This is a land of extremes.

So, why is this place special? There is a fascinating beauty in the ever-changing shapes and colors of the land. This desolate place is the birthplace of North American vertebrate paleontology. The park contains one of the most complete Oligocene fossil assemblages in North America. Scientists

have been studying this area since 1846, when the first fossil from this area, a titanother, was reported. The park also contains one of the largest mixed-grass prairie ecosystems in North America. It has hosted several successful reintroductions of native animals, such as the black-footed ferret, bison, bighorn sheep and swift fox. There is much to discover in the Badlands.

Features

Your journey through this virtual experience will teach you about the past and present of Badlands National Park. See life as it is today, and learn how geologists and paleontologists use scientific information to understand what life was like in the distant past. But this is only a part of the Badlands story. Native Americans, homesteaders, artists, and tourists have also frequented this unique area. Here is a glimpse of what you can expect to learn in this virtual experience.

• Introduction

Badlands National Park in South Dakota protects bizarrely eroded sedimentary rock formations, which contain some of

The stark landscape of Badlands National Park holds a wealth of knowledge about life in the ancient past. (**Badlands National Park photograph**)

The ungulates are the most abundant mammals in the [T]ertiary, and the most important, since they include a great variety of types, some of which we can trace through their various changes down to the modified forms that represent them today.

— Othniel Charles Marsh
Paleontologist

Take a step back in time as you learn about the ancient environments preserved in the geology of Badlands National Park.

Badlands National Park

Introduction Prairie Past Prairie Present Prairie Perspectives

Reconstructing the Past

NPS Illustration by Robert Hynes - Harpers Ferry Center

Select a formation to learn more about what the period of time was like when that formation was deposited.

- Brule Formation
- Chadron Formation
- Pierre Shale

Back

?

Home

ab T

the best preserved mammal fossils in the world. Fossils erode out of the rocks, providing evidence of prehistoric life that inhabited the "prairie past." Today's "prairie present" is now home to animals such as bison, pronghorn, and deer.

Although this land is harsh and rugged, people have always been drawn here: Native Americans, homesteaders, fossil collectors, scientists, artists, and now you.

Come visit Badland National Park and explore its prairie past and present.

• Prairie Past

The jagged peaks of the Badlands tower above you. A history of life starting 74 million years ago and ending 26 million years ago is preserved in the rocks. As you stand on the lower prairie gazing at the wall of crumbling rock, you might ask, "How did it get like this?"

You will discover the answer as you explore the fossils and rock formations that tell the geologic story of Badlands' past.

• Prairie Present

Continue your quest into the present landscape and find out about the prairie, and the plants and animals that inhabit it. Also, learn what the National Park Service is doing to preserve the prairie.

• Prairie Perspectives

The Badlands appear an unlikely place for people to live. The stark and rugged badlands formations rise from the lower prairie as an impenetrable wall, creating a barrier for easy travel from the lower to the upper prairie. Throughout time people have struggled to make this desolate place their home.

Learn about these people, and how you can plan on visiting this wonderful place yourself!

Partners

This knowledge center was developed by the staff members of Badlands National Park and supported by the Natural Resource Program Center *Views* team and Katie KellerLynn.

Contact us

Badlands National Park

Julie Johndreau - Education Specialist
julie_johndreau@nps.gov

(605) 433 - 5242

Views Project

Bruce Nash - Project Manager
bruce_nash@nps.gov
(303) 987 - 6697

Oh! how happy we were to be going to our new home. We had such high hope for a new start in a new state, although we knew South Dakota was still pretty rugged.

— Dick F. Busskohl
South Dakota homesteader

Visit Badlands National Park online:
www.nps.gov/badl